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FOR SECRETARY RICE FROM AMBASSADOR CABANISS
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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CZECH FM SVOBODA'S MAY 16 MEETING
WITH SECRETARY RICE

REF: PRAGUE 482

1. (SBU) Madame Secretary, This is your first bilateral meeting with Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda. I have found him to be a strong and committed supporter of transatlantic relations. Under Svoboda's leadership, the Czechs have become trailblazers in supporting democracy and promoting human rights in countries of importance to the United States. The Czechs are with us on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although Svoboda's future after next month's elections is uncertain, we do not expect any significant shifts in Czech foreign policy. I hope you will use this meeting to (1) encourage the Czech government to continue its pro-democracy activism in countries like Cuba, Belarus, and Iraq; (2) acknowledge Czech contributions to the GWOT and deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans; (3) thank the GOCR for its contribution to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). The Czechs have assured us that they intend to touch on visas only lightly during your meeting.

2. (SBU) The United States and Czech Republic enjoy excellent bilateral relations. The Czechs are strong supporters of transatlantic relations and the Global War on Terror. The Czechs play important roles on issues such as the EU arms embargo against China, where they are among the countries least in favor of lifting restrictions, and democracy promotion in Cuba and Belarus, where they are among the most active supporters of human rights. They view NATO as the cornerstone of their foreign and security policies; while they are working with their EU partners to make ESDP a reality, they insist that this not come at the expense of NATO. The Czech Republic is scheduled to hold the rotating EU presidency for the first time in 2009. They are also vying for a rotating seat on the UN Security Council, beginning in 2008.

A Leader and Partner in Democracy Promotion

3. (U) CUBA: Among EU countries, the Czech Republic is the most active promoter of human rights in Cuba. Czech efforts include providing on-island assistance to political prisoners and their families, teaching Cuban dissident groups about the Czechs, own peaceful transition to democracy, and raising international public awareness about ongoing human rights abuses in Cuba. Within the EU, the Czechs are recognized as the leader of efforts to craft a common policy that actively supports peaceful dissidents and limits official contacts with the regime.

4. (U) BELARUS: Here, too, the Czechs are emerging as a

catalyst for EU efforts to support the democratic opposition. The Czechs supported a strong EU-U.S. statement denouncing Belarusian dictator Lukashenko before the recent presidential election, and supported travel restrictions on Lukashenko and key members of his regime after the election was declared fraudulent. Additionally, the Czechs plan to spend approximately \$1 million in 2006 on projects in Belarus that will increase access to independent media, support human rights and the democratic opposition, and provide assistance to those persecuted by the Lukashenko regime.

15. (U) IRAQ: Czechs have spent over \$5 million in Iraq in humanitarian aid and democracy programs since 2003. This year, in addition to other humanitarian assistance, the Czechs plan to spend \$600,000 on a medevac program that provides life-saving cardiac surgery to Iraqi children (and material assistance to their families). The Czechs opened a new cardiac center in Basra in March 2006, and spend nearly \$500,000 on a training center in Jordan devoted to rebuilding Iraqi civil society by training Iraqi journalists, representatives of Iraqi NGOs, and Iraqi government officials

Punching Above Its Weight on Military Deployments

16. (U) The Czech Republic currently contributes close to 1000 soldiers, observers, monitors, specialists, and civilian police to missions throughout the world. Militarily, the Czechs are involved in U.S., NATO, EU, and UN operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in the Balkans. In Iraq, the Czechs have 100 military police training Iraqi security forces in Basra. A Czech Special Forces detachment will deploy to Afghanistan May 15th, for the second time, to fight under U.S. command. The Czechs maintain 17 ISAF specialists in

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Kabul, fulfilling EOD engineering, demining, and air-traffic-control missions. The Czechs, as part of their ISAF commitments will take over command of operations at Kabul Airport on 1 December 2006. The Czechs contribute 83 troops and medical staff to the German PRT near Konduz. FM Svoboda is a strong proponent within his own government for a possible Czech-led PRT for Afghanistan beginning sometime in 2007. In the Balkans, a 500-troop Czech contingent commands the Kosovo Multinational Task Force-Center, holding responsibility for the security of over half of Kosovo's population. In Bosnia, the Czechs have provided 65 troops to EUFOR's ALTHEA mission. The Czech Republic has 14 observers deployed on 5 separate UN missions in Europe and Africa.

Foreign Policy Implications of General Elections

17. (SBU) With the June 2-3 general elections less than three weeks away, the likely composition of the next coalition government is still uncertain. However, it is clear that no single party will receive enough votes to form a majority government on its own. Whoever wins, we expect most of the key foreign policy jobs to change hands. Svoboda's own future is uncertain: his Christian Democrats are likely to make it into the new Parliament, but may not be a part of the next coalition. Nonetheless, major changes in foreign policy are not anticipated. The Czech Republic will continue to regard NATO as the prominent pillar of the nation's security, continue to deploy troops to NATO and coalition missions overseas, and continue to promote democracy in totalitarian states. The only scenario in which changes are conceivable, though far from certain, would be a minority Social Democrat government supported by the Communists -- an arrangement that is possible, but is not currently high among most observers' predictions.

Visas -- The Sole Bilateral Irritant

18. (SBU) The only notable bilateral irritant is the visa issue. Like other Central Europeans, the Czechs have been pushing strongly for entry into the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). Czechs believe they deserve VWP status as an EU member and coalition ally. The visa refusal rate is currently around 10% -- the lowest in the region, but well above the 3% required for entry into VWP. Unfortunately, the approaching election has turned this into a political issue. In recent months, both the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister have made vague promises to "toughen" their approach to the United States in order to address what they see as asymmetrical visa relations. In fact, nothing has come of this. During a visit to the Embassy last month, the Prime Minister praised the professional quality of our visa operations. For his part, Svoboda has turned his attention to Canada, threatening to reimpose visas on Canadians if they do not drop theirs on Czechs. In doing this, Svoboda has actually made some positive comments about the United States, acknowledging that the USG does not have authority to bring the Czechs into the VWP without Congressional agreement, and praising the U.S.-Czech Visa Roadmap as proof that the USG is committed to seeing progress. The Czech MFA has assured us that Svoboda intends to touch on the visa issue with you only briefly. On the other hand, this will be a central focus of his meetings on the Hill.

RFE/RL -- Czech Donation of \$1.27 m

19. (U) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) came to Prague in 1995 at the invitation of then-President Vaclav Havel. Many credit this move as saving the radios after significant Congressional budget cuts in the mid-1990s made continued operations in their previous headquarters in Munich untenable. During the past 10 years RFE/RL has been housed in the former Communist Parliament building at a symbolic annual rent of approximately \$10.00. After the September 11 attacks, the vulnerability of the present headquarters threatened the security of the building and its 600 employees (of whom approximately 150 are American citizens). After a lengthy search process, Congress approved a site in Prague for construction of a new, more secure building for the headquarters, and the RFE/RL President signed a build-to-lease contract in July 2005 for a building to be completed in 2008. The current Czech government -- and FM Svoboda in particular -- has been very supportive of RFE/RL

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and its mission throughout this process, assigning additional police officers to secure the current building, working with our intelligence services on credible threats, and braving difficulties in bilateral relations with countries such as Iran, which has exerted diplomatic and trade pressure on the Czech government to end RFE/RL's Iranian broadcast service. To cement their commitment to the radios, the Czech government has appropriated a donation of 27 million crowns (approximately \$1.27 million) to assist in the relocation cost. During his visit to Washington, Foreign Minister Svoboda will transfer the donation to the Broadcasting Board of Governors in a special ceremony. I hope you will be able to personally thank him for his strong support, as well as for the government contribution.
CABANISS